

# Early Challenges Inspire Later Success

Entrepreneur and community volunteer Christopher Asego credits the challenges of growing up in a slum as inspiration for wanting to help end poverty.

“The world has lots of problems. People who live them every day have the best solutions,” he says on his Facebook page.

In June, Asego, a YALI Network member, spent two weeks in Chicago and Washington learning how innovators and entrepreneurs in the United States tackle their common business challenges. His visit was sponsored by the Global Innovation through Science and Technology (GIST) initiative and included young entrepreneurs from Kenya, Uganda, Jordan, Tunisia, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Growing up, Asego attended an overcrowded school in Nairobi’s Kibera area. Too shy to question his teacher when he didn’t understand something, he lagged behind his classmates. “Not every child can learn in the same way at the same speed,” he said.

But Asego had an advantage. His mother was a teacher and stuck by her son until he graduated from secondary school. “Not every child is as lucky as I was. ... A lot of children who experience early failure in school end up dropping out,” he said.

Now 27, Asego went on to graduate from Kenya’s Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. He partnered with two peers to create Eneza Education, a firm that serves as a mobile phone-based tutor and teacher’s assistant. Eneza, which means “to reach” or “to spread,” aims “to make 50 million kids across Africa smarter,” according to the company’s website.

Asego said he will take what he learned in the United States back to his community and company. He especially wants to share his knowledge with “up-and-coming entrepreneurs” who face the challenges of getting a business off the ground. “Back home, when you approach an investor, they want to see traction — traction you don’t have because you are just a startup,” he said.

Aside from his business, Asego volunteers to help eradicate jiggers from his community. Jiggers are tropical parasitic insects that “affect the interiors of the toes of children when they walk barefoot,” Asego said. With other volunteers involved in the nationwide effort to eradicate jiggers from Kenya by 2015, Asego goes house-to-house to wash children’s feet with a disinfectant.

“I have developed some kind of attachment to the slum because I grew up there,” he said.

**Photo credit: Christopher Asego**

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